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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS BRIEF AMBASSADOR ON PACE
AZERBAIJAN SESSION

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

1, (SBU) On October 23, NGO representatives Arzu Abdullayeva, Novella Jafaroglu, Saida Gojamanly, Saadat Benanyarly, and Eldar Namazov briefed the Ambassador on their recent trip to Strasbourg to participate in the October 1-5 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) session. The group said that the session, in part, was focused on reviewing the situation in Azerbaijan in light of the April 2007 PACE resolution, which assessed the state of democracy and human rights in Azerbaijan and made recommendations to move forward. According to Abdullayeva, those present were pleased to "finally hear the truth" about Azerbaijan from the human rights activists. Namazov said that PACE members had told the group that the information the activists had presented matched what they had heard from their respective ambassadors to Azerbaijan. He said the activists are now being treated "like partners" by PACE members, and noted that the group's presentation at the April PACE session had resulted in three specific points in the resolution.

12. (SBU) The activists were positive about an increased level of Council of Europe (COE) engagement in Azerbaijan, noting the high number of visits to Azerbaijan by a wide range of COE bodies and officials. According to the group, if the GOAJ does not fulfill the recommendations from the April resolution before the next PACE session on Azerbaijan in January, the COE will re-appoint a Special Rapporteur designated to work only on the political prisoner situation in Azerbaijan. While there had been two Special Rapporteurs on political prisoners in Azerbaijan up until 2005, the new position would also possess the authority to refer cases directly to the European Court of Human Rights.

13. (SBU) Abdullayeva noted that the COE had dissolved the previous Rapporteur positions after the creation of a joint NGO-GOAJ political prisoner task force, when the COE determined that sufficient action was being taken domestically. According to Gojamanly, in spite of the GOAJ "trying to hide" the situation, PACE now recognizes that a political prisoner problem remains in Azerbaijan. The group concurred that the political prisoner task force has had limited achievements, but that no political prisoners have been released since 2006. The NGO members of the task force have long complained that the GOAJ was using the group to appear to the international community that it was doing something to address the problem, while in fact, it was not.

14. (SBU) Separately, Abdullayeva shared her plans to announce on December 10 - the International Day of Human Rights - the creation of the Democracy Council, in follow-up to then-DRL A/S Lowenkron's December 2006 visit to Baku. Abdullayeva

envisions a council comprised of NGO representatives, intellectuals, and "experts," perhaps even from the GOAJ, coming together to assess the situation in Azerbaijan on different democracy-related topics and then develop a specific set of recommendations to move forward. She is currently in the process of creating a proposal, and will be seeking funding from the USG and others in the near future.

15. (SBU) In an October 24 meeting with the Ambassador to provide an update on the range of issues handled by her NGO, Institute of Peace and Democracy Director Leyla Yunus also raised the issue of political prisoners and the possibility of the creation of a new PACE Rapporteur. Yunus has worked with a separate group of human rights activists to develop a list of political prisoners slightly different from the one created by the NGOs that are members of the political prisoner task force. Like the group that visited Strasbourg, Yunus believes the political prisoner problem remains a major obstacle for Azerbaijan's democratic development. We will continue to engage with the human rights activists on this issue.

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